



NEWS RELEASE

By Anna Eisenberg
Warrior Transition Command

June 12, 2014

Wounded Veteran and Army Warrior Trials Athlete doesn't let "a little scratch" stand in his way

West Point, New York — Retired Sgt. Matthew Spang hangs from the starting platform chest-deep in the pool, ready to propel himself backwards into the water. Most swimmers kick back off the wall using their legs to power them forward, but Spang is not like most swimmers. After two improvised explosive devices (IEDs) struck his vehicle in Afghanistan in 2011, Spang ultimately lost both of his legs below the knee.

As he recovered at the Warrior Transition Unit (WTU), Fort Sam Houston, Texas, he saw other wounded, ill and injured Soldiers and Veterans playing sports. "I knew I was able to get to their level, it would just take a while," said Spang. He used that ambition as he recovered and adapted to his wounds. "When you first get hurt, you think 'I can't do this, I can't do that,'" said Spang. "Now I think other people see the injury more than I do."

Three years later Spang is competing in wheelchair basketball, sitting volleyball and swimming at the 2014 U.S. Army Warrior Trials, West Point, New York, hoping to compete in the 2014 Warrior Games.

More than 100 wounded, ill and injured service members and Veterans from across the United States joined together at West Point to train and compete in the Army Warrior Trials, June 15-20. The event is hosted by Warrior Transition Command, and the Army Warrior Trials include athletes from the Army, Marines and Air Force who will face off in archery, basketball, cycling, track and field, swimming, shooting, sitting volleyball and wheelchair basketball. Participants in the trials include athletes with spinal cord injuries, traumatic brain injuries, visual impairment, serious illnesses and amputations.

The Warrior Games, a joint effort between the Department of Defense and the U.S. Olympic Committee is a DoD-wide event for wounded, ill and injured Soldiers and Veterans.

"I definitely feel like I am representing the Army—the wounded Veterans side of it," said Spang. "I feel like it's an obligation to push myself because I have a lot of people involved. It's not just about swimming and being a part of the Army and doing this for myself. It's a lot bigger than that."

Spang's Family has supported him throughout his military career. His father in particular, a retired Army National Guard officer, was part of the reason he initially joined the Army and is a resource to him now. His support system encourages him to reach his long-term goals of participating in the Warrior Games, and eventually a Paralympics team.

"I'm doing this for my Family and my kids," said Spang. "I want to be a good role model and to show them that if you do get injured, you shouldn't stop what you're doing just because you get a little scratch."

#





Caption: Retired Sgt. Matthew Spang, a bi-lateral amputee below the knee, swims on the first day of practice for the 2014 U.S. Army Warrior Trials at West Point, Nk. **Photo credit:** Sgt. Arthur Ruepong

##

Warrior Transition Command (WTC) is a major subordinate command under the U.S. Army Medical Command (MEDCOM). WTC's mission is to develop, coordinate and integrate the Army's Warrior Care and Transition Program (WCTP) for wounded, ill and injured soldiers, veterans and their families. For more information on WTC, visit the new WTC website, www.WTC.army.mil, follow on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/armyWTC> or join Facebook at <http://facebook.com/armyWTC>.

200 Stovall Street - #7S05 - Alexandria, VA 22332